

*The late Alison Arnold wrote the following article in 1975.*

## Long Ago Duxbury

By ALISON ARNOLD

Back in 1907 there were few automobiles in Duxbury for little girls to watch out for when they crossed Washington St. In those days most families went to Duxbury for the summer by train, for the roads were deep in sand and a trip from Boston to Duxbury by car took at least 3 hours.

Dogs were not restricted to baggage cars then. So families with children and dogs, cats in green baize and canaries in cages filled the South Shore trains. Along about Greenbush there was a particularly noisy crossing signal which always made the dogs bark.

Upon arriving in Duxbury, a horse-drawn "barge" with "Martha Washington" lettered along its side, met the train. Wooden steps in back led to the interior of this vehicle, which had long seats facing each other. It came from Briggs' livery stable owned by Eben Briggs' father, and it was often driven by Eben.

### Two Barges

As the barge creaked and rocked along King Caesar Rd., the sand whirled up along the hubs of the wheels. At South Duxbury, 2 smaller barges met the train—the "Pet" and the "What Cheer." These were driven by Mr. Harding.

In those days there was no town water. Kitchen hand pumps produced ice cold well water to drink, while windmills whirled and clattered to furnish water for bathing. Occasionally, an electric pump was installed to offset windless wash days. There were no street lights and lanterns were carried on night visits.

The Yacht Club was then on stilts on the edge of the bay at the foot of Freeman Place. That building is now on the golf course. In 1913 the present Yacht Club was built. After the dances it was a sandy walk up the hill past the churches, which looked very white in the moonlight. There was no golf club and cows grazed on the course and were often hit!

The Winsor House was closed for many years with its doors boarded up and blinds drawn tightly over the windows. The grass grew high, and behind a wall was a huge wooden settle which afforded a perfect vantage point for flaming summer sunsets.

For an imaginative little girl this shuttered house held great fascination and long hours were spent rambling about in the tall grass and peeping under the blinds to catch glimpses of the dark interior with its shrouded furniture. Many mystery stories were woven about this old white house waiting patiently to be opened.

The Wright estate was right opposite the public library, where the Ellison High School now sprawls. This estate was an example of well-kept luxury. Gleaming broughams rolled up and down the long lamp-lit driveways with great urns of flowering plants at the entrance. The tall elms cast long shadows on the velvety green lawn, lights twinkled from the big house, and gardens bloomed behind closely-clipped box hedges.

### No Markets

Hall's Corner had no markets in 1907 and Cushing's Garage was Cushing's livery stable. You could rent a horse and surrey—fringe on top and all-by the hour and drive through the woodsy roads. One of the barefoot Cushing boys—Earl, Paul or Levi—would bring the surrey to your door and you would drop him off before going for your drive, picking him up again on the way home to drive the equipage back to the stable.

There were 3 grocery stores—W.O. Peterson's on Washington St., where the Walter Princes' house now stands; Sweetser and Arnold's (no relation), which is now Sweetser's; and the famous Ford's Store, which burned down and was said to be the oldest in the United States. It was a fascinating place—cool, dark and spice-smelling—and you could buy wonderful sage cheese there.

Sweetser and Arnold's was a typical country store where you could buy everything from a spool of thread to a wash boiler and "East India Goods." Josselyn's, nearby, was famous for its penny candy and all kinds of magazines. And Charlie Josselyn was always patient with little girls who came in to buy crayons or paper dolls for rainy days.

### Wagon-Home Delivery

W.O. Peterson's was a thriving grocery store and groceries were delivered in a wagon driven by Harry Tammatt "Willie Otc," as Mr. Peterson was called, was a tiny frail-looking man who became blind before he died. His wife, the former Mary Hatch, was a stout, florid woman who managed the family with an iron hand. She had a forbidding air, but a warm spot in her heart for children.

She had a large family of cats sired by Mose, a huge black Tom. He used to sit on the counter and listen solemnly to the heated discussions around the pot-bellied stove in winter and the cracker barrel in summer. Mrs. Peterson made bayberry candles and beach plum jelly and kept white fan-tailed pigeons that were most decorative the lawn in front of her house on Surplus St., which is now owned by the Riegels.

### Meeting Place

Paul Peterson's drugstore was the meeting place for those who wanted ice-cream soda—10 cents in those days! Later this became the Village Store and is now the Duxbury Exchange. The drugstore was the goal of many a walk. In fact, walking to the library from Surplus St. was the thing, with a stop either at the drugstore or Currier's ice-cream parlor next to the house which is



now the Duxbury Art Assn's headquarters.

Meat was sold by H.E. Merry, who made the rounds in covered wagon and hacked off steaks and roasts at your door. He was usually accompanied by several of his tow-head children. Fish, vegetables and fruit were also sold in manner, but local vegetables could be brought from the Reynolds farm or from Charlie Holmes or "Bill Hen" Weston on Surplus St. Small boys often came to your door with buckets of freshly dug clams at 35 cents a peck!

#### Favorite Hen

"Bill Hen" was William Henry Weston. He had a name for each of his hens. Henrietta was one of his favorites. In the summer he sold eggs and vegetables and was a familiar figure going along behind his wheelbarrow. Mrs. Weston was a tiny rosy-cheeked woman whose house was spotlessly clean. They lived on Surplus St. where the John Clarks now live. Mrs. Weston would love to see the improvements in her house and the green lawn that used to be just a place where the hens scratched and clucked.

#### Meet Charlie

Charlie Hawkins, who could neither read nor write, delivered your mail and your newspaper if you lived between the Duxbury Post Office and W.O. Peterson's store. The post office was then opposite Peterson's drugstore.

Twice a day Charlie trudged along with his leather mail sack. He carried the mail in individual mailbags made by the owners and he could tell each one by its color or texture. And although he was unable to read, he could always tell the *Herald* from the *Post*.

There were movies twice a week at Mattakesett hall—silent ones, with Jimmy Ingalls playing the piano accompaniment. On Sundays in summer, the hall became the Catholic Church. Dr. Nathaniel Noyes and Dr. Roger Spaulding were the town's 2 doctors and there were no dentists nearer than Plymouth. The high school was partridge Academy, which burned down. The new Town Hall is being built on the site. The primary schools were the Point School on Cedar St. (now Manion Hall); the Tarkiln School; a school where the Legion is now; and the South Duxbury School, which is now the administrative office of the school department. The grammar school was in the village where the Charles Davis family now lives.

Those who know Duxbury only as a growing exurban community or a popular summer resort miss much of its real quality. True, it was a summer resort about 70 years ago, but it wasn't "smart" then, and no one worried about how many Cadillacs his neighbor had or who invited whom to cocktail parties. The sturdy old houses in the village still stand beneath disappearing wine-glass elms. Most of the houses have been carefully restored and are lovingly tended by their new owners, but who lived in them back in the days before Duxbury was "the place to go?"

In the little yellow house snuggled down among evergreens on Washington St., which is now the home of Mr. and Mrs. Wendell Jacques Jr., Miss Jenny Alden used to live. Jenny was named Jane when she was born there, but that was too sedate a name for a sprightly little old maid who had a smile for everyone.

A direct descendant of John and Priscilla, Jenny lived alone after her parents died, and the little house was filled with heirlooms. Her collection of china included Chelsea and Lowestoft and I cherish some blue and white plates she gave me one faraway summer afternoon. Jenny never complained, but she must have been very lonely living with her memories. Her father's hat hung on a peg in the hall long after he died. It made her feel "he'd be back soon."

#### Librarian Higgins

Farther along Washington St. lived Miss Sarah Higgins, for many years librarian at the Duxbury Library. She was known as "Pet Higgins" to the youngsters who visited the library and were greeted with pursed lips and raised eyebrows when they took out any books that were more sophisticated than the "Elsie Dinsmore" or "Doty Dinsmore" series.

The big white house on Washington St. where the Richard Lamere family live, was once the home of Capt. and Mrs. Beadle. He was a dapper little man who always wore white in the summer. Mrs. Beadle was an imposing woman who made it her duty to make a formal call on each newcomer. She was born in the Cape Cod house now owned by the William Shepards.

The house next door to the Beadle house, now owned by the Gordon Bergs, was the summer home of the Whites, parents of Winsor, Marjorie, Norman and Priscilla (Mrs. Edwin Noyes). Across the street lived the Joyce sisters, Sally, Helen and Mrs. Angie Wilde, who were reminiscent of ladies in "Cranford."

In the Hunter house on Surplus St. lived Mr. and Mrs. William Alden, "Willie" was a direct descendant of John. Rumor said he met his wife through a matrimonial bureau and they courted by letters. At any rate, their marriage lasted and they lived to a ripe old age. Raspberry bushes on their land were a great temptation to the children in the neighborhood.

Joshua Cushing lived in the house now owned by Herbert Kelley. Joshua was an auctioneer and held many of the auctions in the house owned by the Oliver Barkers. He stores his treasurers there and many a gate-leg table and Chippendale chair went for 50 cents or a dollar. Joshua's daughter, Mrs. William Facey, and her husband lived in the Surplus St. house now owned by the Charles Rogersons.

#### Many Flowers

Forget-me-nots grew profusely in the brook between the golf course and the Reynolds farm. There were mayflowers, lady-slippers and Dutchman's pipes to be found in the woods behind the cemetery, and hermit thrushes sang their lilting songs there at dusk. Fragrant lilacs were placed on the veterans' graves on Memorial Day, and the Fourth of July meant a parade along Washington St., with red, white, and blue bunting trimming the wagons.

Summers were long in those days. Trips to town were rare and it seemed an eternity from the time when daisies and buttercups grew in the meadows till goldenrod fringed the roadsides. There weren't 6 cocktail parties every Saturday with everyone trying to outdo everyone else. But you could picnic on the big beach while the sun set across the bay and the moon rose over the ocean. Gulls soared over the sand and the waves rose and fell. And when katydids scratched at night and crickets chanted their doleful dirge, it meant that Duxbury days were over for another season.